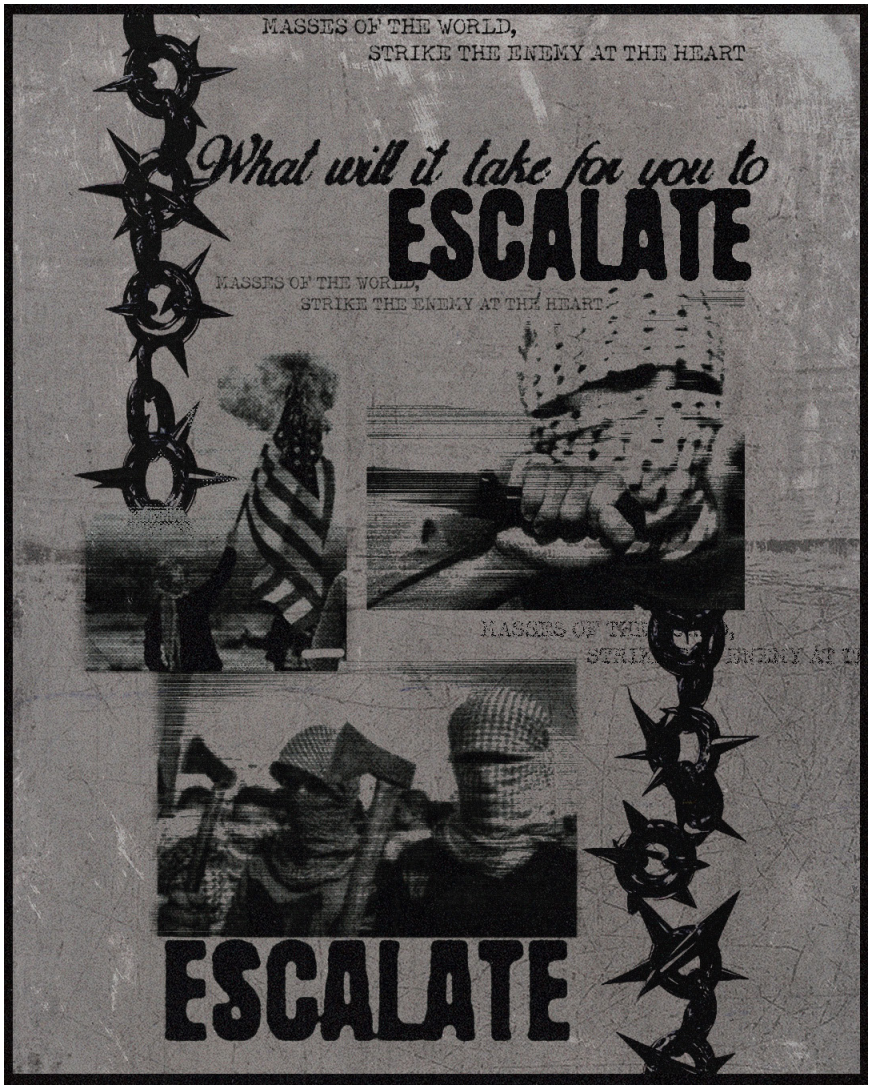
The Reckoning

Gaza demands a reckoning. A reckoning of flames. And it begins with those closest, the millions who chant at protests and—like me—sit behind screens. Those with clear consciences. Because the urgency of the moment cannot be reasoned away.



by **Zubayr Alikhan**

1. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York 1963, p. 63.

2. Mohammed El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims: And the Politics of Appeal*, Chicago 2025, p. 191.

3. Mohammed El-Kurd, *Rifqa*, Chicago 2021, p. 69.

4. Ghassan Kanafani, *Returning to Haifa*, Beirut 1969, p. 77.

5. *Al-Qur'an*. Chapter 2. Verse 249.

6. *Al-Qur'an*. Chapter 4. Verse 84.

7. *Al-Qur'an*. Chapter 103. Verse 2.

8. *Al-Qur'an*. Chapter 5. Verse 23.

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But the matter requires more time.

For time, humanity is ever at a loss.[7]

What then, are we to do?

Enter upon them through the gate.[8]

But the risks are too great, and we cannot compromise our families, our livelihoods.

The audacity is stunning. It might have been humorous if the reality wasn't so morbid. If the backdrop wasn't protruding collarbones and exposed nerves. If we hadn't heard the fading shrieks of relatives under the rubble. If our brothers weren't being raped to death. If we hadn't witnessed the breaking of our fathers, and seen men pulverised under tanks.

Our fear is a charade. Nothing could be more despicable.

At this gruesome juncture, the question is not when the hour shall arrive, nor even if victory is possible at all. Today, away from the cameras, each of us are faced with a more pressing quandary: at what point do we decide to join Gaza in blood? And are we worthy?

The experience of genocide is, beyond agony, a peculiar one. While it is the bombs above your head, it is also the seeing those dearest to you retract their hands from a burning child for fear of a legal code, and a baton. As for the child engulfed, he discovers quickly who suffices themselves with tears, and who dares the flames.

If the past century had not, these last 21 months have evoked the sharpest of contradictions. Rage is a prevalent theme. Devastation. Inertia. Erecting walls and widening the divides has been an effortless task. With every massacre—the families burned alive tonight in Khan Younis, and every slaughter before and after it—we erupt in rage and renew our unwavering allegiance to the resistance. Taking sides is a forgone conclusion. Cursing the Jewish death cult, burning flags, and castigating traitors—we perform these rituals multiple times a day.

And yet today, I am confronted by an all-together more jarring reality. That this rage is a lie. These immovable convictions too. That the bodies once hidden in our closets now fill our homes. That they surround us at every turn. That we are drowning in blood. That there is hypocrisy in every word I pen. Our revolution makes no appearance beyond these pages, beyond weekends, beyond slogans bellowed—all too knowingly into the abyss. And it vanishes, instantly, at the first forecast of rain.

The devastation, and the required path of action—of searing bullets and blood-stained knives—have never been more stark. Today, our cowardice is legendary. It stands as naked

as the emperor, cocooned in all manner of exoneration. Our unbreakable spirits and rivers of wrath perish in the face of sacrifice. And what sacrifice?

When the people of Yemen exclaim, "our blood is not more valuable than the blood of Gaza," they do so from hospital beds, in scattered bouts of consciousness, with exposed flesh. They speak, having fired rockets.

As for us, ours is a world of performance. An entire ethos governed by fear, inferiority complexes, sculpted by the sensitives of empire. Here, we are the harem, flaunting our bodies for western eyes, parading the limbs of our people. There are corpses everywhere. And we dance all around them. Some of us grieve. We weep. In the face of charred flesh we proclaim shamelessly that our hearts are aflame.

Imprisoned by fear, the escape routes are endless. Out of risk mitigation, wisdom, and greater goods, we forge careers. Life must go on. Sitting in cafes, we persuade ourselves of our piety. We clutch at our pearls and convince ourselves that these manicured hands are shackled. We appease ourselves with tears, frolic in prayer, and pour our guilt into carpets. At best, we demonstrate our convictions in humanitarian charity—here too, we escape the resistance.

We escape the rifle at every turn. Of course, we preach earnestly of its virtues. We celebrate the green headbands, romanticise the miraculous faith. A stone-throwing child confronting a tank—we adore the spectacle. Asked to join him, we all flee. The child's bravery was heroic only at distance.

not developed, if the fear and attachment to personal luxury is not expelled, that even as the coloniser's bullets pierce flesh, the body will not writhe.

Even so, the absolute governing principle remains that a thousand shells of words do not equal a single shell of iron. Tens of thousands of true fighters won't be stopped by the fractured tears of men searching in the depths of defeat for scraps of armour.[4]

There is no parallel between the man who visits the camps to distribute toys, and the man who emerges from that camp with a rifle.

Still there are some nagging questions. Absolution clings to us like a soul being ripped from the throat of the dying.

In the scales of pragmatism, this battle is unwinnable, and in it, we have no part.

Yet, how many a small party triumph over the invincible?[5] The parables are quite literally clichés. Gaza stands.

But doesn't victory require formal organisation?

Victory is inevitable. Isn't that what we tell ourselves when action becomes too agitating, before sighing and moving on? Gaza has shown us that victory requires only a handful of true men, holding themselves to account. So fight—you are accountable for none besides yourself.[6]

I know my fingers have not left this page. To some extent, we all rationalise our inertia—else there would be no reader, and I would not be sitting here writing. We remain dinner-table revolutionaries. But our indolence cannot endure.

I see light in the barrel of a rifle. In Molotovs. Shattered ceilings. And if the flame of the Molotov must scorch the compatriot before the enemy, so be it.

When I speak of mass popular mobilisation in revolutionary action, it is envisioned or manifests as a program of chaos, which is to say the spontaneity, anarchic decentrality, and unconfined radicality of organic instinctual rage. It is the decided intent to enact change that progresses at a rate almost too fast—where operations occur across the land, each complimenting, inspiring, and mimicking the other, where the settler's safety is shattered irreparably, and the umbilical of impregnability is severed. Undoubtedly, the response will be brutal and the losses crushing—at end, it is a question of will.

Why does a march to the border disperse at the first fire of teargas? Why does the presence of a uniform allow us to watch a man pummeled without eliciting a response? Why does a blaring crowd of a thousand flee a baton? These are questions of will, of belief, intent, and the willingness to sacrifice. And it is true that perhaps this eagerness to sacrifice, this unfiltered manifestation of the revolutionary impulse, will not occur until the coloniser's violence encompasses all, until it barges through the front door and leaves no alternate path—but it is also true, that if this intellectual condition is

Suddenly, the futility of a stone fills the room. The child is a martyr, but our lives are not to be given recklessly. There are long-standing conventions to abide by. The fervour of youth must never cloud sound judgment.

For even the best of us, the sheer impracticality renders resistance logistically untenable. Never mind the material precedents, the distance is immense and the walls insurmountable. And when, by some divine feat, a tenable scheme is devised, we remind ourselves quickly that liberation requires a multiplicity of tactics.

But if, amidst the rabid fluttering of our lips, we catch a glimpse of our eyes, we would find them revolving, overcome by death.

I know, because even as I write, I struggle to admit that I see it in my own.

Any mention of concrete action, any diversion from the opulent comforts of advocacy, and we see the uniforms charging, the steel of the batons against our skin, the frigid depths of incarceration. Blind to the irony, we conclude that the detriment dwarfs the good. Seated still all the while, we are defeated from the start.[1]

Looking ourselves in the eye, we realise, instantly, the truth of our condition. That the words we so ritually, and vehemently recite, the creeds we claim adherence to, pass no deeper than our throats. That with every convolution, and under every breath, we crystallise our sole conviction: that our lives are

more precious than Gaza's.

All of this, however, is not in pursuit of mourning. For Palestinians in Gaza, mourning has been an impossibility; for us, it is a notion all too convenient. Gaza demands a reckoning. A reckoning of flames. And it begins with those closest, the millions who chant at protests and—like me—sit behind screens. Those with clear consciences. Because the urgency of the moment cannot be reasoned away.

The unbridled barbarity demands we interrogate the pretenses of our absolution.[2] The mental contortions we internalise and spew. The endless means by which we evade, and delay, the inevitable. The doctrines by which we maintain a godless sanity and stifle the rattling of our hands.

Are we not accountable? What have I and those like me given? What have we sacrificed? What sanctity did we preserve? Did we shatter the monotony of our daily lives in the face of genocide? How many times did we stutter? How often did we forsake the skins of our people to save our own?

Already, before we have had a chance for introspection, I hear calls for a solution. For a pristine path. The glaring apparency of the answer reveals the question's insincerity. I am tempted to ask what you would do if it was your child. Your father? Your fighters calling? Such rhetorics, however, are centred in selfishness. It's the same egoism by which the 'Nazi' becomes the global byword for evil, when europe has enacted graver horrors on the reds, blacks, yellows, and browns, for centuries. We shouldn't need to superimpose

ourselves in an imagined suffering to heed the screams of the burning. Or have the fashions of liberal capitalism, and the isolation of the harm principle, forged our hearts? Have we forgotten how to act in the service of others?

Today, all of us stand in awe of Gaza. We look upon its people with the greatest admiration. From our living rooms, we lust over their faith. The scenes are undoubtedly breathtaking. Children reciting prayers in lieu of anesthetic; Kites—white, with a long tail; A mother ululating for her fallen sons; Prostrations atop the rubble.

Romanticizing the spectacle is natural. Still, I cannot help but notice the expediency of our tales. Our privilege as observers renders the idylls perverse.

At some point, the question begs: why are the suicides never mentioned at the party?[3] The children who threw themselves from windows. The men who trampled women in the daily wars for food. The women who looked to men for a price. And what about the thieves?

Are these subjects taboo by virtue? Perhaps there's something more sinister at play. Perhaps they threaten the serenity of our lullaby. Why is it that we worship the miracle, but turn our backs on its calling?

Revolution is the skeleton in our closet. We are all only too aware of its presence. How could we not be? We've spent the past 15 months running from it.